

WHAT STARTED AS A "bit of a fluke" for Frances Burstein is now a solid fact as the Capilano College professor begins to pack her bags for China.

Seated in a small apartment overflowing with books of every description in piles on the floor, Burstein does not look like the distinguished scholar she is.

But a quick look at her credentials is more than enough to convince the curious that Burstein is a prime choice for Guangzhou (Canton) Institute of Foreign Languages officials seeking "foreign expert" scholars for their university.

An English instructor at Capilano College since it was first created in 1969, Burstein has her Ph.D. from Boston University and 25 years of teaching experience including Boston, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and University of Massachusetts (Amherst).

Right now, though, Burstein has more on her mind than her academic qualifications as she tries to pack for a one year, possible two year, sojourn in China as a lecturer at the institute.

"It was all a bit of a fluke," she smiles as she glances at the chaos that was once a living room floor. "All the post-secondary English departments received notices last summer that the Foreign Experts Bureau in Peking was looking for teachers.

"I wrote off and received no word from them until the end of March, when they asked 'if it would be convenient for me' to start this September.

"Somehow I expected a

bit more correspondence back and forth."

The lack of correspondence has produced some curious problems for Burstein. For example, she doesn't know if she will be teaching graduates or undergraduates, what she'll be teaching (her specialities are American and British literature and composition), how many she'll be teaching, or even how she'll be teaching — by lecture or discussion.

Consequently, guessing as to which books are most appropriate to take all the way to China is about as scientific as winning the notorious "Sweep Six".

"I know I'll need obvious books like dictionaries, thesauruses, standard literary works, but as to the types of literature and ages I haven't a clue," she says. "I also have no idea what the library will be like."

With only 140 lb. each

allotted to her and son Brian, who is joining her for at least the first year, some tough decisions have to be made.

Books are only a small part of the problem. A major one will be overcoming cultural problems English teachers over here never think about.

"I'll be teaching students who don't have any background in Western literature, a background that I just assume over here," Burstein says. A lot of allusions will have to be explained. "I'll have to fill in on Biblical references, certainly, and it will have to be done very delicately because there is still some hostility from the students."

Other puzzles include figuring out just which languages are taught at the nine-language institute. "I've figured out seven of them, but two have me stumped," Burstein grins.

As well as packing selectively (even though she doesn't leave until Aug. 25), Burstein is learning some Mandarin Chinese in advance.

(Although the institute is 5  
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km from Canton, Mandarin is the language used at university.)

The language is difficult but fascinating, she says.

"It seems strange from the outside, but once inside it is beautiful ... there's lots of music." Learning Mandarin not only enables her to get by on the streets, but gives Burstein a better sense of the problems her students face in learning and speaking English, for example grammatical construction.

She also finds out in advance that she will have to answer to "Buh-eh-tine" instead of Burstein because the Chinese language cannot accommodate all our western sibilants, particularly "r" sounds. "Heavens knows what Brian's name will sound like," she says.

Burstein is also boning up on what else she can expect when she steps off the plane. "The food will be a delight, I

know, and I'm looking forward to that," she says.

Other fine points include not drinking the tap water. Apparently no one does, she says, and water intended for drinking is served hot.

Burstein still doesn't know what to pack in clothes, although one friend who taught in western China wound up wearing light blue "Mao jackets" and pants all year.

Another unknown is what Brian will do for a year. The Institute appears to have plans for him, but the Bursteins don't know what they are yet.

In the meantime, Brian has bought a bicycle to get in shape for what will certainly be a trip into Canton every day from the Institute.

What has the reaction been to her appointment from her colleagues at Capilano? Burstein says they are pleased, delighted, even jealous, and she is flooded

by questions about the need for other "foreign experts".

The college administration has been particularly supportive, and even gave her a professional development grant, Burstein says.

Her appointment is certainly a first for Capilano and possibly for B.C. community colleges.

One of the things it does do is show the community the high calibre of instructors at the North Vancouver college, most of whom hold PhDs or MAs in their discipline.

"Yes," muses Burstein, "one of the mistakes we made at the beginning I suppose was calling ourselves instructors instead of breaking down into professors, assistant professors and instructors." But though the name is misleading to the community, the quality of instructors at the college is what counts in the final analysis.

Throughout the interview, Burstein's almost tangible anticipation buoys the conversation. Despite so many unanswered questions, her confidence seems big enough to take on all of China and win.

# Goodbye Cap College, hello China